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SOURCE Sloboda.TWO ASPECTS OF STEPINAC'S PROMOTION

[Comment: The following article was taken from Sloboda, a weekly newspaper published by the American-Serbian Cultural Association in Chicago, which is the official organ of Srpska Narodna Odbrana u Americi (Serbian National Defense in America).

This is an organization which is primarily interested in working for a Greater Serbia. As such, the organization pursues a vigorous program of working for the liberation of the Serbian people and is an impassioned supporter and defender of ex-King Peter II, the Serbian Orthodox Church, and Draza Mihajlovic. Conversely, Serbian National Defense is hostile to the Vatican, Catholicism, the Croats (who are considered a primary cause of present-day Serbian difficulties), and Stepinat, for his alleged close affiliation with the Ustashi government during World War II.]

Some time ago, the Pope pointed out the necessity for filling vacancies in the College of Cardinals (whose number has never been so small), because the increase in work has overburdened the [Papal] Senate [cardinals in residence in Rome] and "nationalist" cardinals [in residence abroad]. The Pope's delay in making new appointments has been interpreted principally as follows. Some thought the entire administrative apparatus of the Holy See would be reorganized first because it was outmoded and that cardinals to fill vacancies would be appointed afterward. Others attributed the delay to involved international relations, for it is well known that in making appointments, the Holy See considers many other factors besides sacerdotal services of prospective candidates.

In the past, cardinals have frequently been appointed as a result of agreements between the Vatican and countries concerned, the countries thus assuring themselves of influence in the Senate or the Conclave. In some instances, predominantly Catholic countries such as Austria even have had the right of veto over Papal selections.

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The Pope whom the Catholics consider their infallible, sovereign, religious leader, is not only the supreme head of the Catholic world, but in his relations with non-Catholic countries, he is a recognized international juridical agent with authority equivalent to that of a chief of state. The influence of the Vatican in international policy is attested to by its relations with Protestant England, the non-Catholic US, and Glib France. These relations are not a mere empty form, nor are they restricted to the religious needs of Catholics in these countries, but have a definite political character, which is disguised with legalisms or justified as being connected with the needs of the faithful.

The extent of influence recently exerted by individual countries to have their bishops made cardinals is not known, nor is it known to what extent direct or indirect influence was brought to bear by individual countries in the appointment of Archbishop Stepinac. However, it is absolutely certain that his appointment not only violates principles of international courtesy as regards Tito, whose desires or authority were not considered, but it also degrades the principles of international courtesy. The appointment contains a silent but very clear reminder to the great powers who support Tito that his power is waning at home and in international relations.

The slow and prudent Vatican would never venture to humiliate Tito or so directly censure Tito's preparations for visiting England if it were not convinced of Tito's loss of power and his imminent downfall. Stepinac has become a cardinal because the farseeing Vatican wants to show Tito's protectors that the lessening of his power presages the downfall of his regime.

At the height of his power, after the battle of Stalingrad, when it was suggested that he establish relations with the Vatican, Stalin cynically asked, "How many divisions does the Pope have?" Today, Tito cannot even say this in jest, because there is no longer any jesting for him.

The appointment of Stepinac has an extremely dark side. We [the author] are not concerned with international or internal legal combinations [agreements?] which may be hidden behind its ostensible political purpose, for we do not intend to engage in hypotheses offered by various sides. We must, however, confine ourselves to asking whether the blow to Tito is powerful, whether it is important on an international level, or whether it does not strike at a higher law and exacerbate open Serbian wounds.

It is no secret that Archbishop Stepinac is not completely innocent in the eyes of righteous men or in the eyes of the persecuted Serbians. We [the author] are not referring to Tito's charges [against Stepinac] and the sentence pronounced against him, which are as invalid as the acts of any totalitarian government, but certain undisputed and well-known acts of the Archbishop testify against him. He may repent or even pay for them; we can forget or even forgive them, but they will always remain unrepented, unredeemed, unforgotten, and unforgiven [by the Serbians?].

It cannot be disputed that the following happened in the area under the jurisdiction of Archbishop Stepinac. All the bishops of the Serbian Orthodox faith and almost all Orthodox priests were mercilessly killed; and several hundreds of thousands of Serbian men, women, and children were brutally murdered. Certain priests under the jurisdiction of Stepinac murdered, instigated murders, and led Ustashi hordes. Serbians were Catholicized by force. It cannot be disputed that Stepinac did nothing to prevent or condemn these killings and persecutions.

The only protest was made by the College of Bishops of the Independent State of Croatia (Nezavisna Drzava Hrvatske) in the late autumn of 1941, long after the mass murders took place. This purely theoretical protest was not initiated by the bishops but was made at the request of the Vatican. This ineffective protest lacked sincerity (one of its signers was Archbishop Saric). The protest was proof of the Vatican's indignation and attested to the indifference of the College of Bishops of the Independent State of Croatia.

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Archbishop Stepinac's participation in ceremonies held in honor of Pavelic and the Ustashi and his attendance at military parades held by the Independent State of Croatia and the Nazis offer proof of his sympathy with, or, at best, of his indifference to one of the bloodiest regimes the world has ever seen.

The Archbishop is not a man lacking in personal courage, nor is he a church leader who lacks methods of opposing illegal state authorities. The best proofs of Stepinac's personal courage were demonstrated when he was a volunteer on the Salonika front in World War I and in his attitude toward Tito and his authorities. Stepinac was not an indifferent observer or an appeasing churchman toward Tito as he was toward Pavelic. On the contrary, Stepinac stood up to Tito and protested his illegal actions as being against Christ's teaching and the Church's interpretation of right and mercy. The Holy See properly approves Stepinac's actions in this respect but cannot veil the sins he committed during the dark days under the Independent State of Croatia.

Who knows, maybe Stepinac is a penitent as well as a martyr! Perhaps the Vatican knows something which we do not. Perhaps, as the first proof of his sincere penitence, Stepinac has given his word to dedicate his future life to redeeming his mortal sins. As a cardinal connected with the Vatican, perhaps Stepinac will do for his religion and his people what he did not do as Archbishop Stepinac, when he was left to himself. -- Mladen J. Zujovic

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